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CIA blames ex-agent for betrayal of NATO spy ring

By Ernest Volkman

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WASHINGTON — The CIA believes that one of its former agents, who has since become a leading critic of the agency, was responsible for the betrayal to the Soviet Union of a large NATO spy ring operating in Poland, U.S. intelligence sources say.

The former agent, Philip Agee, who now lives and works in London, has been ordered deported by the British government, which has refused to give any reasons for its order other than "the national interest."

The entire story of the Polish ring and its possible link with the former CIA agent is one of the more tangled in the history of Cold War espionage and involves some of the most prominent figures in Poland.

Jerzy Pawlowski, a Polish army officer and former world fencing champion, was among those arrested and charged with spying. Some other members of the ring — the exact number is not known — were helped

sidered one of the best operations ever formed by Western intelligence behind the Iron Curtain. Its destruction has crimped Western intelligence operations generally.

A hearing on the deportation order of the former CIA agent is being held in London in closed session.

Agee said Thursday that he knew nothing about the Polish spy ring case and that British officials refused to specify the accusations against him.

Some sources doubt the CIA's story that Agee could have exposed the ring. They point out, for example, that four years elapsed between Agee's alleged revelation to the KGB in 1971 and that agency's move against the spy ring in 1973. Further, Agee had already told his superiors in 1968 that he planned to resign, so the CIA would hardly give him the sensitive mission of contacting the spy ring's leader.

Not all the facts of the Polish case are known, but the sources give this account:

Agee, 41, was a CIA agent from 1956 to 1968, operating mainly in Latin America. After leaving the agency, he became a strong critic of the CIA, charging that it had conducted illegal covert operations.

His alleged connection with the spy ring in Poland began in 1971 in Cuba. Agee was researching material on CIA operations against Cuba for use in a book and, in conversations with Cuban intelligence and KGB officials, allegedly revealed the existence of a major Western spy organization operating in Poland.

Agee's knowledge of the ring reportedly stemmed from his assignment for the CIA in 1968 at the Olympic Games in Mexico City, during which he was to contact the leading member of the spy ring, Pawlowski, a lieutenant colonel in the Polish army. Pawlowski, one of the most popular figures in Poland, was also a world fencing champion and had won an Olympic gold medal in 1968.

In June 1975, the KGB and Polish counterintelligence suddenly swooped

down, arresting Pawlowski and more than 100 other persons on charges of "spying for a foreign power." Pawlowski was sentenced in April 1976 to a prison term of 25 years.

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A number of other members of the ring got out of the country with the aid of British intelligence before the KGB arrests.

Western intelligence officials believe that the ring was highly successful in obtaining information on Soviet and Warsaw Pact military dispositions in Poland, plus data on relocations between Poland and Moscow.

The officials add that the KGB was so incensed at the scope of the ring's activities that it demanded that all its members be shot. However, Polish officials refused, pointing out that many of the ring's members were either popular or respected officials, and that the execution of Pawlowski might cause the Polish army to revolt.

Agee has a long history of confrontation with the CIA.

In 1973, he published a book entitled "Inside the Company: A CIA Diary," which named many persons who Agee said were CIA agents operating overseas under diplomatic cover. One key CIA operative in Latin America named by Agee was Richard Welch, who was assassinated later, shortly after being made station chief in Athens.

Agee's actions have infuriated CIA officials. They have publicly accused him of endangering agents' lives and privately charge that he is now working for the KGB. In reply, Agee has charged that the CIA is conducting a "smear campaign" and vendetta against him because of his exposure of what he has called the agency's "crimes."

Philip Agee

to slip out of Poland by British intelligence before the trap closed.

Sources say the deportation order came after the CIA told British intelligence of its suspicions that Agee had a hand in exposing the spy ring. The now-destroyed ring was mainly under British control, the sources add, and British intelligence officials were very upset when it was smashed by the KGB (Soviet secret police) and Polish counterintelligence. The ring, involving 120 persons, was con-